

Is the AfD Really Populist?

An Honors Thesis (Hon 499)

by

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Abstract:

The Alternative for Germany entered into the Bundestag for the first time in September 2017 as a far right-wing party that garners most of its support from its opposition to Chancellor Merkel's "open door" policy for migrants. It has been described by the media and other parties as a right-wing populist party based on its ideologies and statements made by party leadership. This classification may be too broad due to the newness of the party and the extensive definitions for populism. This paper seeks to determine what type of party the AfD can be classified as by laying out a standard definition of populism, and comparing the AfD to the French National Front and the Freedom Party of Austria, two major right-wing populist parties in Europe.

Acknowledgments:

I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Gene Frankland, for his advice and support throughout this process. He has been an inspiration for me throughout my collegiate career, and has pushed me to grow as a writer and hone my research skills.

Process Analysis:

I first began writing my paper at the beginning of the 2018 spring semester. I struggled with finding a topic for quite some time. I knew I wanted to write a research paper that combined some aspects of journalism (my major) and European politics (my minor), but I wasn't sure how to integrate the two. Then as I was browsing through the news one day, I saw all kinds of headlines saying that the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party had entered into the Bundestag for the first time in September 2017. As I read further, I learned that this party had strong anti-immigrant and anti-Euro sentiments, a trend that can be found all over Europe, but had not been seen so strongly in Germany since the time of the Nazis. Not only was it surprising that a party with these ideologies would emerge in Germany, it was also surprising how quickly the party rose to power, because the party was founded in 2013.

I decided this would be a great topic for my paper. It was current both in the news and in European politics. My next step was to determine what to focus on. My initial idea was to write about how the party rose to power, and what factors allowed it to enter into the German political arena. When I met with my thesis advisor, he suggested going in a different direction to make the paper less of a history on the AfD. Because the party was so new and grew in popularity so rapidly, there was a lot of debate about what to label the party as. The AfD is described as a right-wing populist party in the media; however there is a lot of debate among scholars as to whether the party can actually be defined as populist. So, I decided to take my advisor's advice and focus on the typology of the AfD.

My advisor also suggested I make the paper a comparative paper using other well-known populist actors in Europe to help determine if the AfD is in fact populist. My next step was to choose what parties to use. After doing extensive research online, I selected the French National Front and the Freedom Party of Austria to compare the AfD to, because both parties had been

around for a long time and were widely defined as right-wing populists. After selecting the two parties to compare the AfD to, I delved into my research. I found books, journals, government documents and websites, and credible journalistic sources about populism and far-right parties in Europe. My advisor also helped me find several credible sources to use. The research part of my paper took up the bulk of my time. Once I felt like I had enough information on what populism is, and the three parties I selected, I began writing my paper.

This paper was different from any other paper I have written before. I am not unfamiliar with writing long papers on political parties, but I have never created a hypothesis about some aspect of a party, and then set out to prove my idea through detailed analysis. Most of the papers I had previously written were more so historical chronologies about the party.

Writing a comparative party was also new for me, and by far the most challenging aspect of the paper. It was necessary to use the other two political parties for comparison to give the reader a base for what a right-wing populist party looks like today in Europe. The difficult part was weaving those two parties into the analysis in a way that didn't just make it look like they were thrown in randomly. Writing a comparative paper taught me how to intertwine related yet separate concepts in a way that added support to my thesis.

Being a journalist, I am use to having to curate facts. I really had to apply that skill with this paper. My research presented many different opinions on how to even define "populism" itself, as well as how to apply it to political parties today. Through all the research I did, I found the most widely accepted definition of populism, and was able to apply that when I began to define the party type of the AfD.

Another challenge of this paper was determining how exactly to analyze the typology of the AfD, and what sources to use for my analysis. I knew I needed to analyze several party

documents, but the analyzation needed to go beyond that in order to give the reader an all-encompassing view of the ideologies of the party. That is when I decided to also look into the AfD's online and in-person presence. This made determining if the AfD was in fact populist difficult, because the AfD presents itself differently in its official party business and on its more unofficial platforms. Looking at all of the AfD's political programs and platforms helped me learn how to sort out contradictory information within a political party, and how to correctly relay and analyze its programs and ideologies.

This paper is a great start for anyone looking into how they can analyze the typology of a political party using a comparative paper perspective. I believe it shows the benefits of using a comparative paper when analyzing a specific political party, and gives good aspects of what platforms to analyze. My findings are slightly different than that of other scholarly articles on the AfD, because of the comparative nature of the paper and the sources I chose to analyze. If I had the opportunity to further expand on this paper, I would like to focus more on the social media use of the AfD and how voters are engaging in their social media as a new way of expression.

Introduction:

In the European elections of 2014, the electoral performance of the “populist parties” reached new heights. The French National Front gained 24 seats, and the Freedom Party of Austria won two extra MPs compared to 2009 for a total of 18 members.¹ The newest “populist” party in Germany, the Alternative for Germany (AfD), entered into the European Parliament for the first time, winning seven seats. The surge in popularity of populist parties is a growing trend in Europe. The problems with the management of the euro, the sovereign debt crisis by the EU, and issues on immigration have resulted in a lack of cohesion among Europeans, causing more and more Europeans to reject the EU and turn toward far-right parties that are Eurosceptic and nationalistic.² Today, a majority of European countries have at least one successful populist party: In one-third of the countries, a populist party is among the three largest parties in terms of votes won.³

Populism has become the main analytical category for far-right parties that envelope an ideology that rejects immigration, favors the restorance of national sovereignty over a community with the EU, and favors the idea of unity over pluralism.⁴ Radical right parties have been gaining momentum since the 1970s, and have been challenging the old cleavages of the political systems, such as the opposition between the center and periphery, church versus state, and labor versus capital.⁵ With new parties such as the AfD, it can be difficult to determine what

¹ European Parliament. *Results of the 2014 European Elections - Results by Country - Germany - European Parliament*. 2014. <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/elections2014-results/en/country-results-de-2014.html>.

² Lazaridis, Gabriella, and Giovanna Campani. *Understanding the Populist Shift: Othering in a Europe in Crisis*, 2-3. London: Routledge, 2017.

³ Mudde, Cas, and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser. *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*, 2nd ed., 52. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.

⁴ Lazaridis and Giovanna, *Understanding the Populist Shift*, 14.

⁵ Pauwels, Teun. *Populism in Western Europe: Comparing Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands*, 1. Abingdon: Routledge, 2014.

kind of party it is because of its diversity, both ideologically and in its ability to get and keep voters, and its newness in the political arena.

How can a political party be categorized as populist? The term “populist” has been used by the media too broadly. The way it is used suggests that “populist” refers to all politicians that oppose the neo-liberal economic model. Populist propaganda combines and integrates form and context, meaning it targets specific audiences and adapts to specific contexts.⁶ Ilvio Diamanti, an Italian sociologist, said that the word “populism” itself does not define, but evokes.⁷ It is difficult to have a unique definition of populism when categorizing populist parties due to the heterogeneity of each movement. There are far-right opposition parties, like the National Front, which are not in national government and are excluded from power. This is because in France, mainstream parties reject political collaboration with extreme right parties that appear too closely linked with fascism. On the other side of the spectrum, there are parties in government, like the Freedom Party of Austria, which have great power in parliament.⁸ The FPÖ is currently in government as a coalition partner of the ÖVP.⁹

It was once thought that populist parties could only be successful in the opposition, but may have difficulties once in government. Now, in a general sense, populist parties are seen as more resilient, and are increasingly more anchored in contemporary party systems.¹⁰ The AfD reflects this general trend. It is the most successful newcomer in German party politics in

⁶ Lazardis and Giovanna, *Understanding the Populist Shift*, 3-4.

⁷ Ibid, 13.

⁸ Ibid, 2.

⁹ Hilary Clarke, Hilary, Stephanie Halasz, and Judith Vonberg. "Coalition Government with Far-right Party Takes Power in Austria." CNN. Last modified December 18, 2017.
<https://www.cnn.com/2017/12/18/europe/austria-government-intl/index.html>.

¹⁰ Pauwels. *Populism in Western Europe*, 2.

recorded history, even though they did not enter parliament in the 2013 elections.¹¹ The AfD is challenging the established party system in Germany. It has provided a new political platform for Eurosceptic sentiments to be expressed.¹² So what kind of political phenomena is the AfD? Is it a challenger party, there to upset the norm, a protest party who entered the scene to argue against certain issues, or a true populist party? With the AfD being fairly new in the political scene in both Germany and Europe, it can be difficult to analyze the typology of the party. The party appeals both to right-wing extremists and people who are simply dissatisfied with the status quo. It has taken support from all of Germany's mainstream parties. The categorization of the AfD as a right-wing populist party has been a big point of contention both among scholars and the party itself.¹³ Although it has tried to avoid the right-wing populist label, the party tends to be grouped with parties such as the Freedom Party of Austria and the French National Front, two European political parties that are clearly right-wing populists.

The German version of populism is both generic and specific. It denounces the elites and the established parties, while speaking for the *Volk* (German word meaning both the people and ethno-culturally defined nation). German populists attack the mainstream media, and make use of their social media.¹⁴ The rise of the AfD and its ability to steer clear of any Nazi connotations is unusual, and a significant development for European politics.¹⁵ Based on the content of the AfD's 2014 European election manifesto, resolutions, online presence, and language used during debates, I would argue that the AfD does not appear to be as populist when analyzing its official

¹¹ D'Ottavio, Gabriele, and Thomas Saalfeld. *Germany After the 2013 Elections: Breaking the Mould of Post-Unification Politics?*, 169. London: Routledge, 2016.

¹² *Ibid*, 182.

¹³ Decker, Frank. "The "Alternative for Germany": Factors Behind its Emergence and Profile of a New Right-Wing Populist Party." *German Politics and Society* 34, no. 119 (Summer 2016), 4.

¹⁴ Ash, Timothy G. "It's the Kultur, Stupid." *The New York Review of Books*, December 7, 2017.

¹⁵ Arzheimer, Kai. "The AfD: Finally a Successful Right-Wing Populist Eurosceptic Party for Germany?" *West European Politics* 38, no. 3 (2015), 540. doi:10.1080/01402382.2015.1004230.

party content, but could be classified as a nationalistic, right-wing populist party similar to the FPÖ and FN when looking at its more unofficial platforms.

The Setting of the Party:

The AfD was formed in 2013 by a group of disaffected CDU and FDP members as an anti-EU party who objected to bailouts for countries in debt, like Greece. The AfD should not be considered a splinter party from the CDU, because the founding members were recruited from a broader center-right background, as well as university professors (all of whom are economists), entrepreneurs, and a former state chair of the FDP.¹⁶ Over time, the strongest appeal for the party has become its anti-immigrant stance, especially toward migrants from Muslim countries. Germany has received over 1.5 million migrants from Middle Eastern countries since 2015. The party seeks to change the constitution to remove the right of an individual to a hearing in asylum cases, deport immigrants whose applications to remain in Germany are rejected, and seal the EU's borders. The AfD supports the "traditional nuclear family model," and is typically described as a far-right wing party with ethnic and racist nationalistic tendencies.¹⁷

The AfD won 4.7 percent of the vote in the 2013 Bundestag elections, just short of the 5 percent threshold. The CDU/CSU won 41.5 percent of the vote, up 7.7 percent since 2009.¹⁸ In the 2013 elections, the AfD almost explicitly addressed the issue of the euro zone crisis. The party offered an "alternative" view for voters, suggesting Germany should not continue with relief efforts for the indebted European countries, and proposed the "dissolution of the euro-area

¹⁶ Arzheimer. "The AfD: Finally a Successful Right-Wing Populist Eurosceptic Party for Germany?" 541.

¹⁷ Chase, Jefferson. "AfD: What you need to know about Germany's far-right party." *DW*, September 24, 2017. <http://www.dw.com/en/afd-what-you-need-to-know-about-germanys-far-right-party/a-37208199>.

¹⁸ D'Ottavio and Saalfeld. *Germany After the 2013 Election*, 1.

into smaller, economically more homogeneous parts.”¹⁹ The AfD was only slightly behind the more established FDP, and may eventually become the CDU/CSU’s main competitor on the right. In the May 2014 European Parliament elections, the AfD polled 7 percent of the national German vote, more than twice the number of votes cast for the FDP.²⁰ The AfD entered the Bundestag on September 24, 2017 as the third largest party, taking 13 percent of the national vote. The party’s main stronghold is in the former communist East Germany, where it won 20 percent of the vote in the 2016 regional elections. The AfD’s main appeal to voters is its opposition to Merkel’s open-door policy toward migrants.²¹

The AfD has taken an economically liberal position and is in favor of stricter immigration rules.²² Opposition to a continuation of German financial aid to EU member states affected by the debt crisis was the single most important explanatory factor of vote choice for the AfD in 2013. A mix of economic liberalism and social conservatism may be helping the AfD attract votes from different subsections of the electorate.²³ The AfD is a “responsive policy seeker,” taking over issues that are neglected by the mainstream parties. The party mobilizes voter sentiments against the way traditional parties deal with the public – and how they managed the economic crisis – rather than appealing to their own programs.²⁴ The anti-euro issue and critiquing of the Eurozone crisis management could have made the AfD a one-issue party, but the party managed to escape that fate.²⁵ The AfD is now more than just a niche party. Before, they were just a single issue party based on Germany’s involvement in the European debt crisis. Now, the AfD has become attractive for disappointed CDU voters who criticize Merkel’s

¹⁹ Ibid, 89-90.

²⁰ Ibid, 3.

²¹ Chase. "AfD: What you need to know about Germany's far-right party."

²² D'Ottavio and Saalfeld. *Germany After the 2013 Election*, 93.

²³ Ibid, 106.

²⁴ Ibid, 9.

²⁵ Ibid, 197.

modernization of the party's social policies, and for disappointed FDP voters. The AfD essentially took over the "old" issues of the mainstream parties and made that their political strategy.²⁶

The AfD was initially viewed by the media and electorate as a party created by economics professors, entrepreneurs and ex party members, all drawn from the CDU.²⁷ The party has a widespread electorate. One pollster defined the party as a "clear bourgeois party with center-right oriented voters." In the 2013 elections, 20 percent of votes cast for the AfD were former FDP voters, and around 15 percent were former CDU voters. This high level of cross-partnership shows an interesting catch-all potential: Votes were drawn from former abstainers, and from across the political spectrum.²⁸ One of the last surveys conducted by Ipsos European Pulse showed that two out of three of people interviewed believe that Europe is going in the wrong direction. Seventy-seven percent of the recorded respondents were French, and 61 percent were German.²⁹ According to Eurobarometer data, in Germany, trust for the EU has also declined over the past 5 years, as well as more distrust for the EP and the European Commission.³⁰ This sentiment reflects the AfD's ideologies, as well as other right-wing populist party's ideologies, such as the FPÖ and FN. In order to understand if the AfD is in fact populist, and to compare it to the populism seen in the FPÖ and FN, a cohesive definition of populism must be found.

²⁶ Ibid, 168.

²⁷ Ibid, 189.

²⁸ Ibid, 193.

²⁹ Lazardis and Giovanna, *Understanding the Populist Shift*, 189.

³⁰ D'Ottavio and Saalfeld. *Germany After the 2013 Election*, 188.

What is Populism?

First, “populism” must be defined to base the typology of the AfD. Populism can have different meanings in different countries, creating confusion as to how to define the term. In the European context, populism refers to anti-immigration and xenophobia, whereas in Latin America it is considered more in the context of clientelism and economic management.³¹

The Laclauan approach to populism, current to studies in Western European politics, states that “liberal democracy is the problem and radical democracy is the solution.” In this approach, populism is considered a liberalizing force. By reintroducing conflict into politics and appealing to sequestered sectors of society with the goal of changing the status quo, populism can help achieve radical democracy.³² Another approach considers populism as a way for leaders and parties to mobilize the masses. This theory hints at the use of crude political language and behavior to attract attention from the media and gain popular support. These actors can use populism to appeal to the people and oppose the elite.³³

For the purposes of this analysis, I will use Cas Mudde’s definition of populism, which is widely accepted among most academics. Mudde describes populism as:

*“a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic camps, “the pure people” versus “the corrupt elite,” and which argues that politics should be an expression of the general will of the people.”*³⁴

³¹ Mudde and Kaltwasser. *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*, 2.

³² Ibid, 3.

³³ Ibid, 4.

³⁴ Ibid, 6.

Thin-centered ideologies are often restricted and attach to other ideologies. Because of this, the formation of “subtypes” of populism is enabled.³⁵ Populism has three interrelated characteristics: An emphasis on “the” people; anti-elitist connotations; and exclusivity. The people are seen as a monolithic and homogeneous entity. Different individuals and groups are excluded from the ideal notion of “the people.” The elites are seen as obstructions to the centrality of the will of the people.³⁶ Many populists argue that the elite are not only ignoring the interests of the people, but are working against the interests of the country. Within the EU, many populist parties argue that the political elite are putting the interests of the EU over the member states. The FPÖ, for example, will regularly criticize the media for defending “the elite” and not treating the FPÖ fairly.³⁷ Populists are not only hostile to elites, but are hostile toward individuals or groups (“others”) who are not part of what the populists consider “the people.”³⁸

Appealing to the general will is useful to a political party, because it can create different demands and identify a common enemy. It enables the “formation of a popular subject with a strong identity (‘the people’), which is able to challenge the status quo (‘the elite’).” In this way, populism can be seen as a democratizing force because it empowers groups that do not feel represented by the government.³⁹ In terms of the AfD, the party takes the “popular subject” of immigration, identifies a “common enemy,” (that person being Angela Merkel for allowing a large number of refugees into Germany), and challenges both Merkel and the European Union.

Populism allows for and legitimizes authoritarianism and attacks on anyone who may threaten the homogeneity of the people.⁴⁰ So how is populism different from neo-fascism or neo-

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Pauwels. *Populism in Western Europe*, Appendix A.

³⁷ Mudde and Kaltwasser. *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*, 13.

³⁸ Refer to 35.

³⁹ Mudde and Kaltwasser. *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*, 18.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Nazism? Neo-fascists and neo-Nazi groups re-elaborate their heritage of the past. Neo-Nazi and neo-liberal fascist parties cannot be defined as populist, because their aim is at regime change. Populist parties accept representative democracy and its tools, and use strong verbal violence in elections, but reject violence.⁴¹

With populism, there is a shift from biological racism to cultural racism, where arguments against immigration are no longer based on racial differences, but on the collective loss of identity and the extra financial burden immigrants bring.⁴² This type of populism links to nationalism. Populist nationalism “not only excludes others, but in fact rejects all forms of pluralism and difference in the community of the people, relegating all uncertainties or conflicts beyond the borders of the nation state.”⁴³ This creates a discourse of ‘othering’ by far right-wing parties. Some examples of “others” include “Islamic invasion”, Islamophobia, European Union, and the elite. These groups are all seen as a potential threat to society. This leads to the right-wing populist discourse across all of Europe: Nationalism, racism, gender inequality, sexism, and homophobia.⁴⁴ Right-wing populist parties construct arguments based on these concepts that create an “other” and a normalized “we.”

Because of its thin-centered ideologies, populism attaches itself to other ideological concepts that seem relevant to populist actors, the most popular being agrarianism, nationalism, neoliberalism, and socialism.⁴⁵ Left-wing populists combine populism with some form of socialism, while right-wing populists combine it with some form of nationalism.⁴⁶ There are three different types of populism seen on both sides of the political spectrum; the populist radical

⁴¹ Lazardis and Giovanna. *Understanding the Populist Shift*, 179.

⁴² Ibid, 5.

⁴³ Ibid, 6.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 8.

⁴⁵ Mudde and Kaltwasser. *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*, 19.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 21.

right; social populists; and neoliberal populist parties. The first group contains the “prophets” who focus on the new issue of immigration, while the latter two are “purifiers” who claim to defend the “real” socialist or neoliberal values that have been betrayed by the establishment.⁴⁷

Neoliberal populism takes on the beliefs of classical liberal beliefs in values such as individualism, (negative) freedom, a minimal state, and the free market. When combined with populism, neoliberals argue that individual liberties both in the private and public sphere are under attack by the establishment. The aim of this type of party is to diminish big government and state intervention, while simultaneously defending the “ordinary people” against the “corrupt elite.” Social populism combines populism with democratic socialism, a left-wing ideology between reform and revolution. Social populist parties have fused democratic socialism with an appeal to the ordinary people (the working class) against economic and political elites.⁴⁸

National populism is ethnic nationalism combined with xenophobia. Ethnic nationalism is the idea that the nation and the state should coincide, and persons and ideas that are not native to the state are fundamentally a threat for the homogenous state. Only people with the state’s ethnic affiliation should be able to control the state. In order to not appear overly racist, national populists argue that ethnic groups are “equal but different,” and are so different from the native population that they are unable to assimilate. Because certain groups cannot be integrated into society, they present a fundamental threat to the values, way of life, and cultural integrity of the nation. In addition to the anti-elitism within populism, national populists argue that the government should stop imposing “multicultural dreams.” National populist parties also feature authoritarianism in their ideologies. They advocate for law and order and a return to traditional

⁴⁷ Pauwels. *Populism in Western Europe*, 3.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 22-24.

values.⁴⁹ National populists are in favor of returning power to the nation states and regaining power from supranational institutions like the European Union. Their idea of sovereignty is linked to the notion of rebuilding a “homogeneous society” based on ethnicity, giving priority to “nationals” over migrants. This form of ethno-nationalism is legitimized as a form of patriotism and is not limited to issues only on migration. During the Eurozone debt crisis, German parties wanted to impose austerity policies on Southern European countries, pitting the “national interests” of the “virtuous” Germans over those in the South.⁵⁰

Populism can be merged with nationalism when the distinction between the people and the elite is both moral and ethnic. This is not as prevalent among xenophobic populist parties in Europe, due to the fact that the elite are most likely “natives.” Xenophobic populists in Europe define the people in ethnic terms, referring to immigrants and minorities as “aliens,” while arguing that although the elites are natives, they favor the interests of the immigrants over their own native people.⁵¹

Many of the successful populist parties in Europe started out as non-populist parties. The FPÖ started out as a non-populist party, although it had populist factions. It transformed into a populist radical right party after the election of party leaders Jörg Haider. Many populist parties survive the “founder-leader,” even if they go through periods of electoral decline and weak leadership. Some parties move from one strong leader to the next, such as with the FN (from Jean-Marie Le Pen to Marine Le Pen) and the FPÖ (from Haider to Heinz-Christian Strache).⁵² In addition to using ideas of ethnic nationalism and xenophobia, the FN and the FPÖ use

⁴⁹ Ibid, 25.

⁵⁰ Lazardis and Giovanna, *Understanding the Populist Shift*, 180-183.

⁵¹ Mudde and Kaltwasser. *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*, 14.

⁵² Ibid, 55.

authoritarianism in their ideologies. These new populist parties are hierarchically structured, and often have a charismatic leader. This was especially the case with the FPÖ.⁵³

A Brief Look into the Populist Makeup of the FPÖ and the FN

The FPÖ was founded as a follow-up Nazi party and developed into a neo-populist right-wing party that nurtured relationships with far-right and Nazi organizations.⁵⁴ The erosion of the social partnership between the SPÖ and FPÖ, the proportional system, and the structural weakening of Austria's two-party system created an opportunity for the FPÖ to reform itself as a right-wing populist party. Haider modernized the party toward a party of the "New Right," and subsequently in the direction of a right-wing populist party. He created a division between "rightest, neo-Nazi, veteran organizations and revanchist groups and the FPÖ." This made it so right-wing extremist groups and organizations remained, but the FPÖ and its officials could not be directly labeled as revanchist or anti-Semitist. This reformation recreated the FPÖ as a right-wing radical party under neoliberal conditions, while still keeping the Nazi tradition alive. Haider often made "coded" reference to Nazi ideology, but wanted to appeal to a broader electorate, Haider mobilized voters based on ethnic and nationalistic discourses. The type of populism employed by the FPÖ included the transformation of the party toward an authoritarian, leader-oriented party through organizational reforms, which in turn strengthened Haider's leadership.⁵⁵

Haider's political strategy included criticizing and challenging the political elite of the SPÖ and ÖVP, and replacing his ideas of Nazism and anti-Semitism with resentment and racist rhetoric toward immigrants. He mobilized the idea of "the people" against the normalized "other," whom he thought were posing a threat to Austrian workers and to the security of the

⁵³ Pauwels. *Populism in Western Europe*, 16.

⁵⁴ Lazardis and Giovanna, *Understanding the Populist Shift*, 33.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 36.

country. Haider's populism established a new sense of "the people" being betrayed by the elites, and antagonism against immigrants. The party bases its strategy on racist claims and ethnic identity politics, with less emphasis on interest politics, by promoting the inequality of people based on culture or ethnicity. The FPÖ only rallied as anti-EU after Austria's accession in 1995. Haider's anti-EU stance was combined with a neo-liberal agenda of opposing welfare benefits, while at the same time promising social benefits.⁵⁶ Haider's racist, anti-immigrant mobilization influenced other government parties, and had a significant impact on immigration policies and on security issues, in effect tightening asylum laws. While the FPÖ is not an all-out Nazi party, it could be seen as a "silent" organizer for neo-Nazi and extremist organizations. The FPÖ can be seen as both a right-wing populist party on the one hand, and a neo-Nazi group organizer on the other.⁵⁷

The National Front is a prototypical populist radical right party. The FN pitted itself against the four established parties of the time. The FN was founded with a broad variety of far right groups and held together exclusively by the leadership of Jean-Marie Le Pen. The party reformed its image under Marine Le Pen, and the FN has almost quadrupled its leadership since she took over as party leader in 2011. The power structure of the FN is extremely centralized.⁵⁸ The progression of the National Front in the 1980s brought about debates as to whether fascism had made a comeback in France, or if the party was something new that needed to be defined.⁵⁹ Some classify the National Front as being "national populist" to differentiate the party from fascists.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Ibid, 37.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 38-39.

⁵⁸ Mudde and Kaltwasser. *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*, 53.

⁵⁹ Lazardis and Giovanna, *Understanding the Populist Shift*, 31.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 4.

In France, the discourse toward immigration has become more ambiguous, where far-right parties are trying to accuse capitalist immigration politics and globalization instead of the migrants themselves; differentiating the difference between “good” migrants and “bad” ones; and moving the integration border. Now, the FN even portrays migrants as victims.⁶¹ The FPÖ, on the other hand, frames immigration as a potential threat to the ‘homeland,’ or Austrian society. One member of the FPÖ said that wearing a scarf is not included “in Islam,” and is therefore just a “political symbol.” The threat of Islam has become the main issue, and the threatening “other.” The portrayal of the Muslims as “menaces to society” looms over European security and identity.

Analysis of the Party Classification of the AfD:

In order to determine what type of party the AfD is, I will analyze its 2014 European election manifesto, resolutions, online presence, and leadership comments. The AfD dropped the image of the single-issue party about six months after the 2013 state elections by broadening their programmatic profile.⁶² After entering the European Parliament, the AfD did its best to enter into the conservative parliamentary group made up mostly of British Tory MEPs and representatives from the Polish Law and Justice Party, but did not succeed. Although the party tries to avoid right-wing populist parties, it tends to get grouped in with them based off their comments in political debates and other statements.⁶³ One such remark can be found in an email sent by Alice Weidel in 2013 that states that “the reason we are inundated by culturally alien [*kulturfremden*] peoples such as Arabs, Sinti and Roma etc. is the systematic destruction of civil society as a

⁶¹ Ibid, 55-57.

⁶² Arzheimer. "The AfD: Finally a Successful Right-Wing Populist Eurosceptic Party for Germany?" 542.

⁶³ Decker. "The "Alternative for Germany": Factors Behind its Emergence and Profile of a New Right-Wing Populist Party," 4.

possible counterweight to the enemies-of-the-constitution by whom we are ruled. These pigs are nothing other than puppets of the victor powers of the Second World War....” This email is just one example of evidence of AfD leaders’ xenophobic, right-wing nationalist views.⁶⁴

The party’s political manifestos are fairly moderate in comparison to the AfD leader’s speech. They do share the European right-wing populist demand for more direct participation based on the Swiss model. The party is economically liberal with conservative social positions. This brand of national populism defends the wealth and economic standing of the nation, producing a product that emphasizes the superiority of the German national economic model over other nations. The manifestos present a strong position of a free market that separates the AfD from other European right-wing populist parties, which tend to exude more economically leftist positions, yet they seem themselves as defending the welfare systems from migrants who want to “freeload.”⁶⁵ The AfD does play greatly upon “identity politics,” within their manifestos, along with family, gender, and immigration policies that favor a more populist appeal. The AfD’s official programmatic agenda, those being the political guidelines and party manifestos for the German and European elections, have a more economically liberal tone due to the initial dominance of the liberal wing within the party leadership.

The 2014 European election manifesto is the AfD’s first full-length policy document. The 15 most frequent concepts in the manifesto are “member states,” “Eurozone,” “ECB,” and institutions.” None of these words are among the top priorities of any other German party. Although Lucke has claimed the party is neither left or right, the party’s manifesto places it at the far right of the political spectrum, to the right of the CDU and FDP, but to the left of the NPD

⁶⁴ Ash. “It’s the Kultur, Stupid.”

⁶⁵ Decker. “The “Alternative for Germany”: Factors Behind its Emergence and Profile of a New Right-Wing Populist Party,” 5.

(Based on a scale using version 1.3 of Slapin and Proksch's wordfish package for the R statistical system). The AfD is prone to displaying national symbols and emphasizing German's national interests. The slogan "Mut zu Deutschland" (translated roughly to "Dare to stand by Germany") was the title of the party's manifesto and its main slogan for the EP 2014 campaign. It is also used prominently on the party's website, social media profiles, and other party material. The sections regarding policies within European Institutions and immigration have a rather modest tone. The party believes Germany should have a greater say within European institutions, and blames other member states for breaking treaties. In terms of immigration, the AfD supports a point-based immigration system for non-EU citizens, and supports the principles of free movement and free choice of residence for all EU citizens.⁶⁶ These positions do not appear to be overly nationalistic or nativist in nature.

Judging the AfD by its manifesto, the party cannot be categorized as a Radical Right or populist party. The manifesto does not contain any references to "the elite," "political classes," or the "eurocrats." There are no hints of the use of populism that appeals to emotions, oversimplification, or opportunism. There is also no evidence within the manifesto that would suggest the AfD has a "thin ideology" like most populist parties. The AfD is highly critical of Brussels and the German mainstream parties. They blame the banks for the ongoing financial crisis, and call for more regulation of the banks. The AfD wants the EU to hold referendums on future enlargements, as well as important decisions on the euro.⁶⁷

Resolutions adopted by the AfD parliamentary group in its constituent meeting in September 2017 also contain fairly moderate content. The first of the resolutions set out to "finally stop migration chaos." From fall 2015-16, Germany spent about 50 billion euros on

⁶⁶ Arzheimer. "The AfD: Finally a Successful Right-Wing Populist Eurosceptic Party for Germany?" 544-545.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 546.

migration costs. It called for the closing of German borders to migrants, and to reject applications from arrivals from neighboring states. This resolution calls for Germany to reject all types of resettlement plans and the suppression of family reunification from areas that are no longer “directly or not directly contested.” The AfD fears that the influx of immigration could shake the cultural and economic peace in Germany. The second resolution is called the “Euro Memorandum,” and is based off the condemnation of Macron’s “World Government Declaration.” The French President Emmanuel Macron wanted to abolish Europe’s “reestablishment,” and thus Germany’s financial and state sovereignty in favor of a centralized liability and transfer union. The AfD argued against this plan in favor of more national responsibility to create a sound financial and economic policy. The third referendum created by the AfD was direct democracy according to the Swiss Model. This referendum stated that citizens should not only vote for the Bundestag every four years, but should be able to participate directly in political decisions at the federal level at any time. This would require a constitutional amendment in Germany. They said that they “want to give the people the right to initiate their own laws and to change or override laws passed by parliament” and to close the gap in democracy.⁶⁸

The lack of populist content in the AfD’s European election manifesto and resolutions can be misleading. To view the party from all platforms, it is necessary to analyze the AfD’s presence on the internet. The pages analyzed on the website contain comments on media reports, current events or document statements by prominent party leaders. “AfD” (573), “Alternative” (338), and “Deutschland” (531) are among the five most popular stem words. The AfD’s website has a clearly right-wing populist tone. About 40 percent of the references to “Germany” are used

⁶⁸ AfD. “Resolutionen Der Bundestagsfraktion Der Alternative Für Deutschland.” AfD Kompakt. Last modified September 29, 2017. <https://afdkompakt.de/2017/09/28/resolutionen-der-fraktion-der-alternative-fuer-deutschland/>.

in regards to things outside the party's name. The party talks a lot about Germany, German (253), Europe (379), the euro (327), the EU (175), and the Eurozone (62). The tone of the website is a bit harsher than that of the manifesto. There is the occasional attack on the ECJ and refugees who "abuse the right to hospitality." Because there are no interactive elements on the website, the party's main way to interact with members, supporters, the media, and the general public is through social media platforms.

The AfD's strongest presence is on Facebook.⁶⁹ As of April 2018, the AfD had over 397,000 likes on its official page, more than twice as much as the CDU (180,000) and the SPD (about 187,000). In short, the AfD uses its Facebook page to direct viewer's attention to news articles that support the party's positions, curate stories on issues that will vibe with the party's supporters, and sometimes poke fun at political opponents. More populist rhetoric can be found on the Facebook page than on the main party website. The "elites" are hardly ever mentioned, but there are frequent references to conflict between "politicians" and "citizens," as well as calls for protecting "freedom" and "democracy." The party anthem of the AfD is one of the posts on the Facebook page. It says "Germans are a "really super people" who nonetheless "suffer," Chancellor Merkel is accused of treating "us" like a bunch of "right-less monkeys," while politicians more generally are guilty of writing incomprehensible and self-serving laws. The only solution to this crisis is to vote for the AfD." The anthem suggests populist rhetoric of the "other" versus the "we." Supporters of the AfD are allowed to post their own content, as well as comment on posts created by the AfD. These posts tend to reflect nationalistic and populist sentiment in more ways than what the AfD themselves are posting. Typically, the posts are about "ungrateful immigrants, privileged homosexuals, and greedy politicians." Even though this kind

⁶⁹ Arzheimer. "The AfD: Finally a Successful Right-Wing Populist Eurosceptic Party for Germany?" 547-548.

of speech is tolerated, racist slurs and common expletives are rare. This could be due to interventions by the party to keep that kind of language off their page. The AfD does claim that it actively monitors the page and deletes racist or illegal content; however that can be difficult to prove. There is no way of knowing how many items have been posted and then deleted.⁷⁰

Electoral campaigns take on a different tone from the manifesto, referendums, website and social media. Topics of national identity paired with xenophobic positions and a strong anti-establishment rhetoric were promoted, especially in Eastern Germany. Voters showed in the 2013 elections that the AfD's hard-lined stance against immigration in Germany was a stronger reason for their success than the Euroskeptic positions seen in their manifesto. During the 2014 European elections, power shifted from the economically liberal wing of the AfD to the national-conservative wing due mostly to the Eurozone crisis. The rightward movement of the party was reinforced by the fact that the next elections after the federal and European elections were in East German states in summer of 2014. The party's success in the East was taken as confirmation that the party should continue moving toward a ring-wing course.⁷¹ The refugee crisis catapulted the AfD to new heights. The party grew to be the new voice of protest for the people who protested the large influx of migrants entering Germany. The reformation of the country's asylum laws and criticism of the chancellor by her own party also played into the AfD's hands. In state elections in Baden-Württemberg and Rhineland-Palatinate in March of 2016, the AfD received 15.1 and 12.6 percent of the vote respectively, securing its first double-digit results in a western state. In Saxony-Anhalt, it received the highest share of the vote ever obtained by a right-wing populist or extremist party in state elections, winning 24.2 percent of the vote. Once voter defections from existing parties are taken into account, results show that just under half of the AfD's voters in

⁷⁰ Ibid, 550.

⁷¹ Decker. "The "Alternative for Germany": Factors Behind its Emergence and Profile of a New Right-Wing Populist Party," 6-8.

both Baden-Württemberg and Rhineland-Palatinate and more than half in Saxony-Anhalt used to call the left-of-center camp home. The party also benefits from defections by non-extremist voters from the center-right camp who felt abandoned by CDU's shift to the left.⁷²

Conclusion:

The purpose of this thesis is to determine if the AfD can be categorized as a right-wing populist party. Based off my findings, I would argue it can be classified as a nationalist, right-wing populist party in some manners, and a more moderate right-wing party in others. An analysis of its official party business – its 2014 European election manifesto and resolutions – shows the AfD can be considered a moderate right-wing party based on its programs. There are no outlandish demands in either of these that could be considered populist. No references to the “people” or the “elite,” the most general concepts found in populist ideologies, can be found in either of the documents. Neither the European election manifesto nor the resolutions appear to suggest the AfD has a thin-centered ideology, another main criterion for populist parties. The language used in these documents does not seem nationalistic or nativist in nature. The party's online and in-person presence, however, seems to fall in line with typical national populist sentiment like that seen within the FN and FPÖ. The website and Facebook page have a clearly nationalistic, nativist tone that creates an “other” and an “us.” Even more national populist sentiment can be found in statements made by party leaders.

Racist, xenophobic, nativist comments made by populist party leaders is a common thread between the FN, FPÖ, and AfD, although the AfD does not have one strong leader like the FN and FPÖ. The AfD appears to be less right-wing populist than the FPÖ based on its overall party documentation, online presence, and party leadership. The type of populism seen in the

⁷² Ibid, 10-11.

AfD would fall closer to the type of populism seen within the FN under Marine Le Pen, as both parties attempt to steer clear of typical right-wing classifications officially, but still present as right-wing populists within its leadership and less official pages.

If protest sentiments against the government's current refugee policy begins to subside, the future of the AfD could be rocky, leading to more infighting between the moderate and right-wing camps within the AfD. Even if the refugee issue subsides, however, the AfD can still hold onto their socioculturally conservative positions and fill in other gaps in the party system that have been long forgotten by the CDU.⁷³ Whether the AfD will become more radical and nationalistic in its manifestos and party program is up for debate, depending on how the party keeps doing electorally and how voters continue to positively perceive the party. According to polls conducted by six of the leading national survey collectors, the AfD currently has an average of a 13.2 percent approval rating.⁷⁴ For now, the AfD can partly be classified as a nationalistic populist party, and partly as a moderate right-wing party. The future of the party as a prominent challenger to the traditional party system is yet to be seen as new issues rise in Europe and Germany.

⁷³ Ibid, 12-14.

⁷⁴ "Wahlumfragen Zur Bundestagswahl." Wahlrecht.de. Last modified April 30, 2018.
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